

JEFFERSONIAN DEMOCRACY.

ADDRESS OF
CHARLES W. JONES,

U. S. SENATOR FROM FLORIDA,

ON THE

LIFE AND WORK OF THOMAS JEFFERSON,

DELIVERED ON THE

OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATION OF THE 138TH ANNI-
VERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF THOMAS JEFFERSON.

BY THE ESSEX COUNTY DEMOCRATIC CLUB,

NEWARK, N. J.

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GENTLEMEN: It would be difficult for me to give you any adequate expression of the feelings which at this moment animate my heart. The occasion which brings us together—the name of the immortal man whose birth we are assembled to commemorate—the undying principles of government which he has left us as an inheritance to all succeeding generations of men, not only in America but in all parts of the world—the unselfish fidelity and devotion which he exhibited in the cause of human freedom and for the benefit of mankind—the grand and glorious results which have followed his great exertions in behalf of oppressed men here and everywhere, all go to swell and magnify this occasion so far beyond the proportions of an ordinary festive meeting that my poor, weak mind approaches the discussion of his claims to the gratitude of the human race with a consciousness of feebleness and incapacity that no other subject could create. Oh, gentlemen, you cannot imagine what a world of thought you have stirred within me by requesting me to speak to the name of Thomas Jefferson; that name which, from the time my youthful eyes first opened on the history of patriots and public benefactors, filled me with an admiration and a love which advancing years have only increased and intensified. Who was this man, and what the foundation

of his immortality? Why is it that nearly every day we witness his grateful countrymen rising up and rendering public homage to his memory? He lived at a time when other great minds illuminated this continent. He was the contemporary of Adams and Hamilton, and others equally distinguished, who have left behind more ponderous volumes than he did. Why is it, I ask you, that while the thoughts and principles of Jefferson have burned into the souls of men, and are constantly recurred to as the true foundation of popular government, the works of the others are only the study of the learned and the curious, and seldom mentioned before the people without a blush or an apology? Why is it that the youthful student of free principles and of popular rights, when looking around him for something authoritative and learned to exemplify and make plain his own innate and natural conceptions of true liberty, is compelled to go to the shrine of him whose honored dust is commingled with that of his fathers in the soil of the Blue Ridge Mountains?

Gentlemen, the explanation is plain. The real friends of the people are few; the laborers in the vineyards of their enemies are numerous. When this extraordinary man came on the stage of public action the world was enveloped by a clond of political darkness. The best minds and talents in existence gave themselves up to the work of slavish adulation at the feet of kings and emperors. Much progress had been made in time in the development of the exact and useful sciences. Literature also had its distinguished votaries. But in the midst of all this progress and enlightenment the great majority of the human race were trampled in the dust beneath the heel of the most cruel despotism. Every book and pamphlet that saw the light of day was either conceived in the abject spirit of passive obedience, or dedicated to some royal upstart. The laboring masses of Europe were starving and half-naked, while the products of their hands were appropriated to maintain the most vicious system of profligacy, debauchery, and extravagance, on the part of the higher classes, the world ever saw. When Jefferson went to France in August, 1784, as Minister to the Court of Louis XVI, he did not, after the fashion of ordinary diplomats, confine himself to the business of eating fine dinners and bowing before a haughty nobility. Animated by the broadest spirit of human sympathy and brotherhood, which knows no bounds but what are limited by human misery and suffering, he sought at the earliest day to inform himself in regard to the true condition and wants of the people. He travelled in disguise all over that interesting country, sleeping and eating with the peasantry, and

he has left on record the result of his observations. While the gay capital and court were rioting in luxurious life he found able-bodied men working a whole year for \$27.75, and grown women for half that sum. He found families living a whole year on the meat furnished by a single hog. Their bread, says he, is half wheat and half rye, made once in three or four days to prevent too great a consumption. He urged his friend Lafayette to look into the condition of the people, but he would not. He heard the advance mutterings of the great revolution which followed, and, stranger as he was to France, he seemed to be the only statesman of the time who understood the real cause which produced it. If the principles of Jefferson had prevailed in France, if the persons intrusted with the powers of government had discharged their great trusts by studying the wants of the people at large and providing for their interests and welfare, it is probable that the last days of the eighteenth century would not have witnessed the crimes of five centuries avenged, if not blotted out, by a deluge of blood the like of which was never before seen in the world.

I have referred at this time to Jefferson's life in France because it is not so familiar to our people as that part of his career which was confined to his own country, and more strongly indicates his great love for the people than any other part of his history. In strange contrast to his broad and liberal views of government and his love for liberty and liberty-loving men, were the actions of some of the public characters who represented the principles of that party which he so thoroughly opposed in his day—the Federal party. When Rufus King, under the elder Adams, was Minister to England, unfortunate Ireland—the land of Burke, of Curran, Emmet, and Grattan—was convulsed, as it is now, by political agitation. Some of her most gifted sons, and notably Thomas Addis Emmet, who afterwards won imperishable fame at our own Bar, were banished from their native land. This is the only country in the world that the oppressed of all nations can look to as a place of refuge from oppression. Mr. King, as is well known, representing abroad the American school of Hamilton and Adams, which Jefferson tore to the ground, opposed the emigration of those liberty loving and highly-gifted Irishmen to the United States for fear that their revolutionary principles might undermine the foundations of established authority. What think you Jefferson would have done had he been Minister to the Court of St. James? Can any man doubt what his course would have been as the creator of Jeffersonian Democracy? He would have done

what he did in France—opened not only the portals of his heart but of his country to every man who, by speech or blow, had rendered service in the cause of the oppressed people of Europe.

Macaulay has told us in the language of burning eloquence that John Bunyan and John Milton were the only two men who gave existence to any great thoughts during the century in which they labored. And I say it here to-night, in the presence of this cultivated and select audience, that to Thomas Jefferson more than to any man the world ever produced are mankind all over the universe indebted for the freedom, both religious and political, which they now enjoy. But for him the American experiment of free government would have gone down in the very generation which originated it. When he returned from France with his soul filled with the loftiest conceptions of freedom to take his place in Washington's Cabinet he found that the minions of power and prerogative were at work trying to subvert and destroy the great principles of public liberty which he had labored for years to establish. This great republic, upon which was centred the hopes of oppressed men all over the world, had just been launched out among the nations of the earth. Our present Constitution had gone into operation. The immortal Washington was at the head of the Government, and he called around him as advisers the best minds in the country. Alexander Hamilton was at the head of the Treasury, Henry Knox was Secretary of War, Edmund Randolph was Attorney-General, and, fortunately for the country and the world, Thomas Jefferson was made Secretary of State. Nearly eight years of feeble and sickly administration under the Articles of Confederation filled the minds of many thoughtful men with grave doubts and fears respecting the success of popular government. Jefferson himself has told us that upon his arrival in New York he found everywhere nothing but expressions of doubt respecting the success of popular government. This was really a great crisis in our history. Every member of the Cabinet except Jefferson was under the influence of Hamilton, and it was believed that the President himself relied more upon the chief of the treasury than any one else. Many there were who expected that after the achievement of independence unbounded prosperity would spring up all over the land. In this they were mistaken. The very reverse was the case. The country was exhausted by the great revolutionary war, and it required years of repose and peaceful industry, no matter what the form of government, to bring back any considerable portion of the wasted values which had been swept away by the tide of battle.

But, gentlemen, the most instructive fact to remember in connection with this part of our history is that which tells of the constant danger to which systems like ours are exposed from the craft and ambition of those who have no sympathy with the people. No one who has read the history of that period can deny that there were many men who stood high with the people, and some of them high in the Government, who favored the destruction of our popular system and the substitution of a grand and powerful government patterned after the European model which had been prolific of so much suffering and misery all over the world. The distress which afflicted the people, and which was the inevitable result of protracted war, was used as an argument against the right of man to govern himself, and by men who had fought in the Revolution, not so much for real liberty as for separation and independence. These advocates of strong government, instead of honestly pointing out the true cause of existing evils and reconciling the people to them, made them a pretext for diminishing the authority of the masses and strengthening the powers of government. But, thank God, this project was discovered, exposed, and frustrated. The watchful care of the Almighty, which had guarded and carried this people through the fiery ordeal of the Revolution, gave to them a counsellor and a sentinel who stood almost alone on the watch towers of public freedom, with flaming sword in hand, to beat back the insidious enemies who sought to subvert and destroy the citadel of true popular government. Is it necessary for me to add that that watchman was the immortal Jefferson, whose fortunate birth we this night celebrate? And oh! when I contemplate the lofty disinterestedness and devotion to the people which he displayed at this juncture in our history—when, instead of combating foreign despots and tyrants, he was engaged in clutching from domestic enemies the precious jewel of our liberty—I feel that I could go to his lonely grave on the side of the Blue Ridge, and in the presence of his sacred dust offer up my thanks to heaven that so great a public benefactor was given to this people.

As long as Washington remained at the head of the Government the enemies of the Jeffersonian system were unable to carry into effect all their schemes of power and centralization. His lofty and serene character quieted for a time the antagonisms that were forming as the Government advanced. But soon the crisis came. John Adams succeeded to the Presidency. Jefferson, no longer restrained by his veneration for the Father of his Country, made bold and open warfare upon the doctrines of the new Administration. Then for

the first time the people of this country were divided by distinct party lines, a division which, with many changes of men and names, has continued to the present time and will continue as long as our Government lasts. Then it was that Jeffersonian Democracy assumed distinct form and shape in opposition to the heresy of Federalism. The first session of Congress under the Adams Administration brought into life the outrageous Alien act, which empowered the President to order any alien to leave the country when he deemed that the public security required it, on pain of three years' imprisonment. At the same session the notorious Sedition law was enacted, which subjected to imprisonment of two years and a fine of \$2,000 any person who should write, print, utter, or publish, or cause or aid in the same, any false, scandalous, and malicious writing or writings against the Government of the United States, or either House of Congress, or the President of the United States, or to bring them or either of them into contempt or disrepute; or to excite against them or either or any of them the hatred of the good people of the United States, or to stir up sedition in the United States, giving the Federal courts jurisdiction over the press in such cases. Acts were also passed creating a standing army and carrying the expenses of the Government far beyond the means of the people. Then came direct taxes and excises, and these proving insufficient to meet current expenditures, loans were resorted to. All the monarchists and aristocrats of the Revolution gathered around the Administration. These men were joined by the Tories, whose sufferings during the war for independence made them the inveterate foes of free principles. This great combination, backed by the National Bank, the Alien and Sedition laws, a standing army, and a willing judiciary, was insolent and overbearing. Leading Democrats (then called Republicans) could scarcely show themselves in public places at the capital without being insulted. "No person," says Mr. Jefferson, "who was not a witness of the scenes of that gloomy period can form any idea of the afflicting persecutions and indignities we had to suffer."

The Jeffersonian Democracy realizing the true nature of the conflict, prepared to meet it. They inscribed upon their banners the principles of their great leader—that all men in political associations are free and equal; that governments ought to exist only for the benefit of the people, and that the greatest blessings under them ought to be enjoyed by the greatest number; that all public authority is a great public trust confided to the servants of the people for their

own benefit, and that no restriction should be put upon the rights of the citizen beyond what is absolutely necessary for the protection of society; that the Alien and Sedition laws and the whole programme of the Federal Administration was in flagrant violation of the true principles of the Constitution, and that it was the duty of every liberty-loving man to resist them in every way compatible with law and order. The time for the final contest came. The Democrats (for that is their right name) put Jefferson at the head of their ticket. I need not recur to the complications attending the election of 1801. The Constitution was different then from what it is now respecting Presidential elections. The votes were not cast as they are now for President and Vice-President as distinct officers. The person having the highest number of votes was to be President and the person having the next highest number Vice-President. Jefferson and Burr were the Democratic candidates. They swept the Federalists from the field. But, although on the same ticket, they had an equal number of votes in the electoral college. This threw the election into the House of Representatives. Burr, false as he had ever been to conscience and duty, and knowing as he did that the people never intended him to be President, sought to supplant Jefferson and reach the first office by the aid of the Federalists. But the latter found they could not elect him, and then they resorted to something like the same means which their successors employed in 1876, when they trampled in the dust the voice of the people. It was proposed to treat the election as a nullity, pass a law in Congress and give the office to either Jay or Marshall. But the Democratic spirit of that day was not so tame as to submit to such an infamy. Jefferson was on the ground, active and earnest.

In a letter to Mr. Madison he said: "The Federalists appear determined to prevent an election and pass a bill giving the Government to Mr. Jay as Chief Justice, or Marshall as Secretary of State. Four days of balloting have not produced a single change of a vote. If they could have passed a law for putting the Government into the hands of an officer, they would have certainly prevented an election. *But we thought it best to declare openly and firmly, one and all, the day such an act passed the Middle States would arm, and that no such usurpation, even for a single day, would be submitted to.*" This determination of the Democracy saved the Government and the country at that day from the humiliating spectacle which we have witnessed—a man in the executive office of this great country who was never elected by the people. Jefferson assumed the power of President,

and then followed during his eight years of glorious service the grandest and wisest administration of affairs this country ever saw. The Alien and Sedition laws were repealed, the army was disbanded, the taxes and excises were abolished, the new judiciary system created by the Federalists in order to put partisan judges for life over Democratic freemen was pulled to the ground, and this great popular Government, under the guidance of the master spirit of Jefferson, was set in the line of its proper direction to subserve the great object of its institution. Oh, how happy would it have been for this people if the principles and spirit of this great patriot could have continued to control to the present time the administrations of our Government! But let us not complain after all that has been accomplished; and while we are compelled to admit that our great fabric of freedom has long since been forced from the orbit in which Jefferson left it, it is yet permitted us to labor for a partial if not a full recognition of the principles which he has left as an inheritance to the Democracy of the United States. Let us also remember that while other political organizations have risen and disappeared from time to time because there were no settled principles behind them, the Democratic party—the party of Jefferson and the Constitution—is yet the same in principle and purpose as when it was formed by its great founder. It is true, we are often charged with being Bourbons—a common expression with those who are ever ready to shift their faith with every little fluctuation of opinion that takes place among a portion of the people, and, while they impute to us an unwillingness to learn anything, show every day by their own conduct that all their knowledge does for them is to produce that unhappy confusion of mind which causes them to “measure their depth by their darkness, and imagine themselves profound whenever they are perplexed.”

Gentlemen, if I were to attempt to describe to you the great labors of Jefferson and the party he created, it would carry me very far beyond the time I have a right to consume to-night. After drafting the immortal Declaration of our Independence, which proclaimed for the first time to the world the true foundations of all human governments and caused oppressed men to awaken from the torpor of ages of tyranny, he applied his practical hand to the reformation of abuses which had grown up under our colonial system. After a few months' service in the Congress of the Confederation he returned to Virginia and became a member of her Legislature. He left the more national and attractive field of central action, but not without a purpose. He diversified his labors so that they might best pro-

mote the welfare of man. He knew that so long as the State systems were impure and unhealthy the Federal power which emanated from them would be in a like condition. He wanted to set an example in Virginia which would be followed in the other colonies, and he did.

His first great attack was upon the laws governing the descent of real property. He set to work to destroy forever that system of primogeniture and entails which kept the land which God intended for the benefit of the human race tied up in the hands of a few families to the exclusion of the body of the people. He accomplished this great work despite the most bitter and powerful opposition in his own State from the favored class which was wedded to the English system. He next directed his attention to the vital questions of religious freedom. He found the Church and State in Virginia united by as compact a system of laws as existed in England. He boldly proclaimed to the world that it was no part of the business of Government to interfere between man and his Creator. Virginia, in 1786, under the inspiration of Jefferson, did that which Gladstone accomplished in Ireland a few years ago, and for which he received such great credit. The dissenting and other sects were relieved from all disabilities under the old laws, and the pampered ministers of the State, no longer fed from the public crib of the people, were at last compelled to serve God in a spirit of humility and without the appendages of wealth and power. Born as he was in the midst of human slavery, the unfortunate African did not escape his attention or go without his sympathy. We are told by high authority that the first bill he ever introduced into a legislative body was in 1769, and was to empower the owners of slaves with authority to set them free by will. After thirteen years of exertion he finally accomplished his great and good purpose. Be it remembered that at that time slavery existed everywhere on this continent. No colony was without it, and while I am compelled nearly every day to listen to imputations and insults directed against the section from which I come because it had the misfortune—(and it was the greatest misfortune that ever befell a people)—to have had the institution of slavery planted there, I cannot forget that in the very States that are represented in the public councils by men who insult the South because she tolerated slavery, the most cruel African bondage once existed. But I am not here to indulge in criminations, but to speak of great public virtues.

Jefferson was far ahead of the great men of his day and generation. Look at his original draft of the Declaration of Independence, in

which he intended to direct a thunderbolt of eloquence and logic against the British King because he upheld the infamous traffic in human flesh and blood, by which innocent men were cruelly dragged from their native land. Here is the passage in full :

“ He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating them and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the *Christian* King of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where *men* should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce. And that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them by murdering the people on whom he has obtruded them ; thus paying off former crime committed against the *liberties* of one people with crimes which he urges them to commit against the *lives* of another.”

That language can be read to-day in his well-known handwriting. But it did not get into the Declaration of Independence. The Continental Congress voted it down because the deep prejudices of that day ran too strongly against the negro. It might be interesting reading to some people now to see how the vote was upon that question. But with my heart throbbing in unison with the broadest sentiments of national unity and fraternity, I shall contribute nothing to the cause of sectional hate. I cannot in an address like this do more than touch a few of the outlines in the great character of Thomas Jefferson. As I said in the outset, when he entered upon the stage of public action he found his country, and indeed the world, benighted and oppressed. To his exertions more than to those of any other man or set of men this country and mankind stand indebted for the measure of national freedom which they now enjoy. The effect of all his teachings was to break down and destroy every barrier and obstacle that stood between man and the enjoyment of the greater measure of human liberty. He left his country after forty or more years of public service in a condition to merit the application of the noble words of a great Irish orator : “ I speak in the spirit of the American law which makes liberty commensurate with and inseparable from American soil, which proclaims to the stranger and the sojourner that the moment he sets his foot on American ground the earth upon which he walks is holy and consecrated to the genius of universal emancipation. It matters not in what language his doom may have been pronounced ; it matters not with what complexion incompatible with freedom an Indian or an African sun may have burned up-

on him ; it matters not in what disastrous battle the helm of his liberty may have been cloven down ; it matters not with what solemnities he may have been devoted upon the altar of slavery and oppression.—the moment he touches the soil made free by Jefferson the altar and the false god sink together in the dust, his body swells beyond the measure of chains, which burst from around him, and he stands redeemed, regenerated, and disenthralled by the irresistible genius of universal freedom.”

I thank you, gentlemen, for the opportunity you gave me to speak these words to night.

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